**Web server** can refer to either the [hardware](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Computer_hardware) (the computer) or the [software](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Software) (the computer application) that helps to deliver [Web content](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_content) that can be accessed through the [Internet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Internet" \o "Internet).The most common use of web servers is to host [websites](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Website), but there are other uses such as [gaming](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Online_game), data storageor running[enterprise applications](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Enterprise_software).

A Web server is a program that, using the client/server model and the World Wide Web's Hypertext Transfer Protocol ( HTTP ), serves the files that form Web pages to Web users (whose computers contain HTTP clients that forward their requests). Every computer on the Internet that contains a Web site must have a Web server program. Two leading Web servers are Apache , the most widely-installed Web server, and Microsoft's Internet Information Server ( IIS ). Other Web servers include Novell's Web Server for users of its NetWare operating system and IBM's family of Lotus Domino servers, primarily for IBM's OS/390 and AS/400 customers.

Web servers often come as part of a larger package of Internet- and intranet-related programs for serving e-mail, downloading requests for File Transfer Protocol ( FTP ) files, and building and publishing Web pages. Considerations in choosing a Web server include how well it works with the operating system and other servers, its ability to handle server-side programming, security characteristics, and publishing, search engine, and site building tools that may come with it.